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THE NEGLECTED MISSIONS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

BY OLIVE R. LA CLAIR

We are told that Father Kino, in carrying out his magnificent scheme of connecting the Jesuit Missions of Sonora with those of Lower California, by carrying them around the head of the Gulf, had several times visited the region of the junction of the Gila and Colorado rivers. From his time down to the time of the expulsion of the Jesuits, efforts were made to accomplish this same object by extending the Missions northward on both sides of the Gulf, but a long space of territory was still unoccupied.

After the Franciscans took possession of Lower California and while they were preparing to occupy San Diego and Monterey, Captain Anza set forth his project of opening a road from the frontier of Sonora to the proposed new settlements. His offer was at first declined, but afterwards, in 1774, under the orders of Viceroy Bucareley, he made the trip and, so to speak, opened the road.¹

The immediate causes of this Anza expedition of 1774 and of the selection of the route are closely associated with the name of Father Francisco Garcés, a friar of the Franciscan College of Santa Cruz, at Querétaro, Mexico. By his explorations of 1770 and 1771 he showed that overland routes existed to both Alta California and New Mexico, and that natives of the Gila and Colorado Rivers were friendly and desirous of conversion. With Anza and Garcés went Thomas Eixarch and he and Garcés were left on the western bank of the river with a few Indian attendants and under protection of Palma, a prominent Yuma chieftain, noted for his friendship for the white man. During Anza's absence, Eixarch remained on the river at or near the site of the modern Fort Yuma, while Father Garcés traveled up and down the Colorado, to San Gabriel and to the Moqui towns, and was well received by all the natives except the Moquis. Although his principal object in his journeys of exploration—the first of which was made in 1768, as will be seen—was the saving of souls, his results are of vast importance from the standpoint of exploration and of plans for frontier advance.²

Taking up his ministry at San Javier del Bac in June, 1768, in August Garcés started on the first of his "entradas" (as his expeditions into California were called) of exploration, going as far as the Gila. In 1769, he made another unimportant tour as chaplain. In 1770, he made another entrada, covering from Bac to and along the

1. Hittell, *Hist. of Cal.*, I, 423-24.

2. Bancroft, *Hist. of Cal.*, I, 354; Chapman, *Founding of Spanish Cal.*, 145.

Gila and the return to Bac. On this journey he traveled among the Pimas Gileños and Opas, both of whom gave him a friendly reception, and upon his return reported that the Pimas Gileños were particularly clamorous for the Missions that he had promised when he visited them in 1768. In 1771, a more important journey was made, and the information gained during this journey had a great influence on the opinion of the junta which eventually recommended Anza's first expedition, and this journey, too, more than any other, helped to determine the route of the expedition.³

Again, with the Anza expedition of 1774, Garcés is found traveling among the Indians of the Gila-Colorado region. On Anza's second expedition, in 1775, with the soldiers and settlers intended for San Francisco, Father Garcés again accompanied him and also two other missionaries from the college at Querétaro, one of them Father Eixarch and the other Father Pedro Font. While Father Font continued on to Monterey, Father Garcés and his companion, as has been noted, stopped at the Colorado and undertook to make surveys of the region and prepare the minds of the natives for the missions. Palma, who had on the previous journeys showed great friendship for the white man, on this expedition was flattered by Anza, who, in the name of the Viceroy, presented him with a suit of clothes and a silver-mounted cane. Thus, arrangements were easily made with him for the protection of the Fathers while Anza went on.

Father Garcés at once began to examine the country along the west bank of the Colorado. On his journeys he carried a banner having on one side a picture of the Virgin, beaming with celestial radiance, and on the other a devil or lost soul writhing in the flames of hell. Traveling among the Indians, he unfurled his banner and noticed that they expressed approval of the pretty picture of the Virgin while they turned with apparent loathing from the other. Thus he passed to the north of the Colorado and back again, and then to San Gabriel, returning by the way of the San Joaquin Valley. After a few other short trips he made his way back to the Sonorian settlements.⁴

Returning from the second Anza expedition, Jan. 3, 1777, Garcés prepared his diary for submission to the Viceroy. He indicated fourteen or fifteen points on the Gila and Colorado rivers as suitable for Missions, but, assuming that the government would not care to found more than four—two on the Gila and two on the Colorado—he advised suppressing the disused presidios of San Miguel de Horcasitas and Buenavista, and the founding of two presidios of fifty men each as posts from which a guard of ten men could be detailed for each of the river Missions, "the surrounding natives

3. Chapman, 146-47.

4. Hittell, I, 424-25.

being numerous, powerful and warlike", and in this advice Anza concurred.

Eixarch also went back to Sonora with Anza and Garcés and was followed a little later by Palma, who desired to present in person his people's wish for missionaries. Thus, it is seen that these returned explorers were all impressed with the importance of founding on the Colorado one or more Missions under the protection of a strong presidio. The Viceroy favored these views also, and promised early in 1777 to transfer northward the two disused presidios as a protection for the proposed Missions, and recommended the whole matter to the favorable consideration of Teodoro de Croix, the Comandante-General.⁵

The question of Gila-Colorado Missions at this time (1776-1777) was one of extreme interest both to the Viceroy and to the King. But connected with it were at least three problems: Should Missions be placed on the Gila exclusively? Should they be placed at the confluence of the Gila and Colorado? And if placed there, should they be manned by Dominicans from Lower California or Franciscans from Querétaro? It was the opinion of Padre Juan Diaz, Governor Crespo of Sonora, the Governor of New Mexico, and the Comandante-Inspector that they should be placed mainly on the Gila because of the directness of the Pina-New Mexico route to Monterey and of the fertility of the Gila land. On suppressing the presidios of Horcasitas and Buenavista, Diaz and Crespo agreed with Garcés and Anza, and they also recognized the need of a presidio on the Colorado.

To Comandante-General Teodoro de Croix, however, the idea of Gila-Colorado Missions was distinctly unattractive. Not so much that he was opposed to the occupation of the rivers but that, like Felipe de Neve, he was unsympathetic with priests, and was beset by need of economy in administration, so he resolved to put into practice on the river boundary of Alta California a scheme of "reduction". We find that this attitude of Croix received countenance from the college at Querétaro also. In 1777, Fray Morfi, a professor of the college, denounced missionary entradas in general and instead of entradas advocated soldiers and war. He did not even favor the establishment of Missions among the Yumas at this time. He would wait for two or three years or until a general pacification.⁶

In the meanwhile, a copy of Father Garcés' journal had been sent to the King together with a copy of Palma's memorial to the Viceroy, in which he asked for missionaries. The King instructed Croix to attend to Palma's wishes, as the Viceroy had done, and to have the Missions and presidios established, as proposed by the friar. "Had these commands been carried out", says Father

5. Bancroft, I, 355; Richman, Cal. Under Spain and Mexico, 129.

6. Richman, 130-31.

Engelhardt, "the Missions would have been established on a firm basis, and paganism on the Gila and Colorado would have disappeared instead of flourishing for more than a hundred years later; hostile savages would have become peaceful neophytes, many lives would have been spared, and millions of dollars would have been saved to the governments of Mexico and the United States". But as we have seen, Croix was in no hurry to execute the royal will, nor did he care to comply with the urgent request of Father Garcés and the Yuma Indians. Finally, he resolved to do what he could not avoid without displeasing His Majesty, but at the smallest cost possible, and according to an altogether new plan in which no friar was to have a voice. So on March 20, 1780, the formal instructions for the founding of these establishments were issued.⁷

We find that there was to be neither Mission, presidio nor pueblo proper, but the attributes of all these were to be in a manner united. The soldiers were to protect the settlers who were to be granted house lots and fields. The friars were to act as pastors to attend to the spiritual interests of the colonists and at the same time to be missionaries. The priests were to have nothing to do with the temporal management, and native converts were not to be required to live in regular Mission communities but might secure lands and live in the pueblos with the Spaniards. Each pueblo was to have ten soldiers, ten settlers and six laborers.

It can readily be seen that this was certainly a change in the Mission system. "De Croix", says Bancroft, "has been charged with having been influenced by "arbitristas politicos" (political schemers) who knew nothing of the subject and by false notions of economy. And further, with having paid no heed to the advice of the only men who were qualified to give it; with giving instructions to the friars in matters entirely beyond his jurisdiction; with direct opposition to the laws of Spain, especially in uniting Spaniards and Indians in the same pueblo, and in having in his stupid pride and ignorance exposed over fifty families to sure destruction". We may attribute a large part of the bitter feeling exhibited by the Franciscans on the subject to the tragedy that followed, as Bancroft says, and to the removal of the temporal management from their hands, yet we must admit that Croix acted unwisely. The time and the place were not well chosen for such an experiment. Anza and Garcés had expressed the opinion that Missions could not be established in that region except under the protection of a strong presidio, and Garcés, as soon as he heard of the plan, sent in repeated protests and warnings, but they were all in vain.⁸

At this time (1780), in connection with the college at Querétaro, Croix sent sixteen soldiers with their officers, and sixteen settlers

7. Engelhardt, *Missions and Missionaries of California*, II, 350-51.

8. Bancroft, I, 357-58.

with their families to establish the two Missions. During their explorations in 1775 and 1776, Garcés and Eixarch had chosen the Puerto de la Concepcion and the Puerto de San Pablo as the most desirable sites for future Missions, and it was to these sites that the colonists were sent. The first of these Missions, which was located on the west bank of the Colorado, nearly opposite the mouth of the Gila—near the site of the modern Fort Yuma—was named La Purissima Concepcion de Maria Santisima, and the other, on the same side of the river but twelve miles lower down, was given the name of San Pedro y San Pablo de Bicuner. The missionaries at the former were Fathers Garcés and Juan Barraneche, and those at the latter, Fathers Juan Diaz and Moreno.

The system adopted in the founding of these establishments, says Hittell, was so entirely different from that employed in the other California Missions that Paloú called it "*el muro modo de conquistar*" (the new method of conquest). "There was not even to be any distribution of food or in fact anything done which would powerfully attract the Indians or make it their special interest to be peaceable and submissive. The converts, instead of being maintained or taught to maintain themselves, were to be left among their wild neighbors and to support themselves as best they could. The underlying spirit of the new establishments soon proved to be economy, not only of means and labor but also of interest in the natives. With a system so defective and with Indians of a character so intractable as these ought to have been known to be, it is no wonder that difficulties sprang up".⁹

When Lieutenant Santiago Islas and his settlers arrived at the new Missions, they had with them one hundred and ninety-two head of cows and horses and two hundred sheep, and the soldiers forty-two riding animals. Despite protests, these ranging along the banks of the river were allowed to trample the corn fields of the Indians. Then, too, the settlers at once occupied the narrow spaces of ground, the only ones fit for cultivation, along the river bed, thus driving out the Indians. The result was disagreement and quarrels and finally bloodshed.

The Missions had scarcely been established when want began to be felt. The limited supply of provisions soon ran out and the Indians who had expected to be kept in good humor with presents became dissatisfied. Thus, affairs began to look very serious. The missionaries sent to San Gabriel for supplies and told of the serious condition of affairs and said that unless supplies could be sent them at once they would be compelled to abandon the establishments. A few supplies were sent from San Gabriel, but they did not go far, and in the meanwhile the trouble over the cultivated land grew worse. There were no open struggles, but the Indians were growing more and more dissatisfied. They could see no advantages in the

9. Hittell, I, 427.

Missions and could only look forward to being eventually driven out from their fields. Knowing that there could be no great danger in making an attack upon the whites, since their forces were so inadequate, they resolved to kill the missionaries, soldiers and settlers and destroy the Missions.¹⁰

Affairs at the Missions were in this condition during the summer of 1781, when Captain Rivera y Moncado arrived with a party of recruits and a number of horses and mules on his way from Sonora to Santa Barbara. He had with him about forty soldiers and their families, and no less than a thousand head of horses and mules. Ensign Cayelano Limón and nine soldiers also marched with him as an additional guard and escort. When the party reached the Colorado, so many of animals were weakened and exhausted that Rivera y Moncado decided to remain there with them until they should be able to go on, while the people and animals in good condition went on in charge of Limón. Added to his party now were Sergeant Robles and six soldiers sent out by Felipe de Neve to meet Rivera y Moncado. Thus again, when this large party arrived at the Colorado their animals wrought damage along the east bank of the river, where the camp was made. Then, too, stocks and a whipping post had been set up and used, thus giving the Indians another grievance, so that by this time they were thoroughly disillusioned and disappointed.

On Tuesday, July 7, 1771, the storm burst. Scarcely had Limón departed, leaving Rivera y Moncado on the east bank with seven soldiers and some mules and horses, when the Indians, collecting together in great numbers, fell upon the Missions and massacred all the whites, with the exception of the women and children, whom they made prisoners, and a few men, who escaped. They then set fire to the Missions and all the buildings that had been erected, and, leaving the smoldering ruins, crossed the river and fell upon Rivera y Moncado and his seven soldiers and slew them. "Thus", says Bancroft, "died Captain Fernando Javier de Rivera y Moncado, one of the most prominent characters in early Californian annals, who had come in the first land expedition of 1769, had been military commandant of the Monterey establishments and who at the time of his death was Lieutenant-Governor of Baja California".¹¹

In the meanwhile Ensign Limón and his nine soldiers having arrived safely at San Gabriel, turned westward on their return. Upon reaching the Colorado, Limón was told of the tragedy but would not believe the report until he arrived at Concepción and saw the ruins. He had no time for making investigations now, for the Indians, as soon as they learned of his return, attacked him with great fury. One of them wore the uniform of Captain Rivera y Moncado. Limón and his soldiers immediately turned back toward

10. Hittell, I, 427-28.

11. Bancroft, I, 362-63.

San Gabriel and, bravely repelling the hordes which followed them for several days, managed to reach that point, losing only two men. Reaching San Gabriel, Limón told Neve what had occurred and offered to go back if furnished with twenty soldiers, to avenge the massacre, but Neve wisely declined and ordered him and his men to return to Sonora by way of Loreto, and at the same time he sent an account of the occurrences by them to Croix.¹²

But the news had already been carried by the Pimàs to Tucson and by one of the captives who managed to escape, thus reaching Croix at Altar in August. The 9th of September a council of war was held, and it was decided that the Yumas must be proceeded against as apostates and rebels. Pedro Fagés and a large number of soldiers were ordered to the Colorado to ransom or rescue the captives and inflict the necessary punishments.

Upon reaching the ruins of the Missions everything appeared as undisturbed since the massacre. Since all the bodies of the dead lay exposed, except those of Fathers Garcés and Barreneche, it was hoped that they had been spared. This was thought possible because Garcés had been very popular among the Indians, by whom, on account of his usual salutation, he was known as "El Vivà Jesus". But upon further search a spot of ground was discovered which was covered with green grass and flowers, while everything around it was burned and blackened. Upon digging here the bodies of the two missionaries were found, still clothed in their priestly robes, and it was learned that an old Indian woman, to whom they had been kind, had buried their bodies and planted the grass and flowers".¹³

The Indians told many strange things about the massacre. They said that after the massacre a procession of people dressed in white with tapers in their hands, with a cross-bearer and acolytes, was seen every night going around the Mission chanting. After going around several times they would disappear. Thus, the Indians became frightened and abandoned the place, going eight leagues down the river.

This story of the procession, says Hittell, was accepted not by the common people alone but also by officers and all the first men of the time. It was certified to as part of the judicial proceedings. Fagés repeated it to Palou, and Palou, in utmost good faith, inserted it in his histories as a perfectly well-authenticated fact.¹⁴

Although the Indians had concealed themselves in the woods down the river, Fagés succeeded in opening communication with them. After ransoming the captives, he started for the settlements in Sonora, taking with him the captives and the bodies of the martyred missionaries.

12. Hittell, I, 430.

13. Publications of Hist. Society of So. Cal., 1893.

14. Hittell, I, 432.

As has been seen, there had as yet been no punishment of the Yumas, so, in the early part of 1782, De Croix ordered Fagés and his men to return to the Colorado. Leaving the larger portion of his forces, under Pedro Fueros, at the Colorado, Fagés proceeded with the remainder to San Gabriel to confer with Governor Neve upon the plan for a campaign against the Yumas. It was decided to defer the campaign until September, when the river would be low and easily fordable. This being decided, Fagés returned to the Colorado, sent Fueros and his soldiers to the presidio in Sonora to wait until August, and he and his soldiers returned to San Gabriel for the same purpose.

About the middle of August, José Antonio Romeu, with the Sonora troops intended for the campaign, started for the Colorado, and a little later De Neve and Fagés, with about sixty soldiers, started from San Gabriel. But upon approaching the river, De Neve and Fagés were met by couriers with dispatches informing De Neve of his promotion to the inspectorship of the presidios of the Provincias Internas, and Fagés of his appointment to the governorship of the Californias. Of course, this changed their plans at once. Fagés returned to San Gabriel to take possession of his new government, while De Neve proceeded to the Colorado, where he joined Romeu and his troops. They carried on the campaign for a while, but were exceedingly cautious. A few skirmishes took place and a number of Indians were killed.¹⁵

This is about all we know of the campaign, and it can easily be seen that it was a failure, since the Yumas were not subdued, peace was not made and the rebel leaders were not captured. As a result, the nation remained independent of all Spanish control and was always more or less hostile. No later attempt was ever made to establish either presidio, Mission or pueblo upon the Colorado, and this route never ceased to be dangerous. "Truly, as the Franciscan chroniclers do not fail to point out, the old way was best", says Bancroft, "since the innovations of De Croix had led to nothing but destruction; 'el muro modo de conquistar' was a failure".¹⁶ "The scheme", says Coues, "had been a novel one—one so novel that Arricivita styles its author, Croix, an artificer of death (artifice de morir)".¹⁷

"Croix was at fault, no doubt", says Chapman, "but claimed that Garcés and Anza had deceived him. Garcés having perished in the massacre, Anza was made the scapegoat. The achievements of Gálvez and Bucareley, ably supplemented by those of De Neve, were not undone by the disaster, but their work suffered a permanent check. They had placed Alta California on an enduring basis, but it was settled on July 1, 1781, that the province was not to develop at that time on a large scale. Thus, gold was to remain undiscovered

15. Hittell, I, 433.

16. Bancroft, I, 370-71.

17. Coues, *On the Trail of a Spanish Pioneer*, I, 18.

for over half a century, and the Pacific coast to be without sufficient allurements to induce its conquest by a strong power, until at length the United States was in a position to be a factor. Had Alta California settlements failed, England or Russia, presumably the former, might well have occupied the territory. That Spain's establishments did not fail was the work of Bucareley. That they did not become rich and populous was in a large measure the fault of Croix".¹⁸

"If," says Arricivita, "as recommended by Garcés and Anza, two garrisons, strong and mutually supporting, had been placed by Croix on the Gila and Colorado, and if, under cover of these, there had been placed on each stream two Missions,—establishments to which the natives were solicited, or even compelled, to repair, and at which rewards and punishments were meted out to them,—there seems reason to believe that the design of Kino might have been accomplished".¹⁹

Bartlett, in his Narrations of 1852, tells us that traces of these old Spanish Mission buildings could still be seen close by Fort Yuma. They consisted of partly demolished stone walls of old buildings, though a few years before the walls of a church were visible.²⁰

Thus, it is seen, began in blunder and ended in blood, after enduring a few months, the Missions of La Purísima Concepción de María Santísima and of San Pedro y San Pablo de Bicuñer—the only Missions that ever were upon the Colorado.

18. Chapman, 387.

19. Coues, from Arricivita's *Cronica Serafica y Apostolica*.

20. Coues, 150, note.